

CPYRGHT

Not Necessary in Second Strike

Rate Decreases

# U.S. at Odds on Soviet Missiles, Report Reveals

No Finding Made on Russ. First-Strike Capability, Staff Document Says

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WASHINGTON—An unpublished

Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff document reveals a basic disagreement within the government over whether the Soviet Union is going for a first-strike nuclear attack capability in its missile program.

This question is central to the issue of whether the United States should build an antiballistic missile defense system.

The document discloses that the United States intelligence board, comprised of the top national security agencies, has never made a finding that the Soviet SS-9 intercontinental ballistic missile was being deployed to develop a first-strike capability. The document does not indicate whether the board, on which the Defense Department is represented, was unanimous on this question.

## Laird Testimony Repeated

In Senate testimony March 21, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said that the Soviets "are going for a first strike capability. They're going for our missiles and there's no doubt about that."

In addition to the statement on the intelligence board's assessment, the staff document makes 18 other brief "assertions" concerning the Soviet missile program and related matters.

The Times has obtained a copy of the document which is based for the most part on information about Soviet missile deployment and capabilities which Central Intelligence Agency Director Richard Helms gave the committee. Helms also is chairman of the intelligence board.

The committee decided at a closed meeting Monday, it was learned, against releasing the document. It voted instead to invite Laird to come before the committee to explain the document and what Laird and other officials have been saying.

Laird's view is that large numbers of SS-9s are not necessary in a second-strike, or retaliatory, strategy.

SS-9s are not needed to destroy population, in this view. Smaller CBMs, which Russia also has, could do the job. If there is a larger-than-needed number of SS-9s, the Laird view would be that it can mean that the Soviet Union may plan to achieve first-strike capability—destruction of U.S. missiles before they could be launched in retaliation.

The document obviously was intended as a counter to the Nixon Administration's campaign to win support for its Safeguard ABM plan in the Senate, where the division on the issue is close. It states:

"The intelligence information received by the committee does not accord in many important respects with the intelligence cited by certain officials of the executive branch and referred to in certain press reports.

"Because of the important part intelligence information has come to play in the debate on the proposed deployment of the Safeguard ABM system, and because the committee believes that the intelligence information made public has often been erroneous and thus has inadvertently created false impressions both within the government and among the public generally, the committee believes it has a responsibility to attempt to clarify certain questions of fact."

Another apparent difference between what the Administration has been saying and intelligence information received by the committee concerns the rate of building and deployment of the SS-9.

In a "fact sheet" issued March 14 to help demonstrate the need for Safeguard, the Pentagon said that "the Soviet ICBM program has not leveled off as we had hoped. In fact, if anything, it has accelerated, and they are continuing to deploy their big missiles."

The statement might leave the impression that Soviet missile deployment has increased. The staff document says:

"1 — We have known about tests of the SS-9 for five years."

"2—In the past two years, the rate of deployment of these missiles has decreased and not increased.

"3—The number of SS-9 launchers discovered since November, 1968, represents an increase of less than 3% of the total number of SS-9 launchers which we know now to be deployed."

The document also said that last year's national intelligence estimate "predicted a range of deployment which accords with the situation today."

Several committee sources agreed that the apparent behind-the-scenes intelligence debate on the ABM concerns not so much hard data but rather the interpretation and assessment of that data.

## Divergence Seen

In short, Laird and the Administration apparently say the facts mean one thing while Helms and others say they mean something else.

The document said the committee believes that clarification of the situation "can best be accomplished, without compromising national security, by making a number of assertions. The detailed classified evidence to support these assertions will be made available by the committee to any member of the Senate who wishes to see it."

Among the assertions which the document listed were the following:

—There had been no change in the size of the warhead capacity of the SS-9 in the past five years.

—Last year's national intelligence estimate did not predict that SS-9 deployment would level off at a number below 200 but predicted a range of deployment which accords with the situation today.

—The SS-9 could have been developed as a vehicle for independently targeted multiple warheads or for special purpose weapons or—but not necessarily—to attack hardened targets.